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THE VENEZUELAN ELECTIONS OF
14 DECEMBER 1947

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THE VENEZUELAN ELECTIONS OF 14 DECEMBER 1947

SUMMARY

The economic and social reform program of the Acción Democrática, the implementation of which was begun under the Betancourt provisional Junta, was approved by the Venezuelan electorate on 14 December 1947 in the first truly democratic national election in the country's history. The overwhelming victory of the Acción Democrática, which gave it the presidency and control of both houses of Congress, not only assures a progressive and pro-US government but continues in power an active non-Communist party which can be counted on to obstruct the development of a strong Communist movement.

Note: This paper has the concurrence of the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Air Force and the Navy. The dissent of the Department of the Army is set forth in Enclosure "A".

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THE VENEZUELAN ELECTIONS OF 14 DECEMBER 1947

The elections held in Venezuela on 14 December 1947 reflect the character of the revolution that occurred in that country in October 1945, and confirm the view that the Venezuelan Government is today, for the first time, democratic both in form and in operation.

During the two-year interval since the revolution, Venezuela has been governed by a Junta headed by a political reformer named Rómulo Betancourt. On coming to power, this Junta instituted a program of economic and social reform without precedent in Venezuela's history. At the same time an intensified effort was made to win wider popular support (a) as a defense against counter-revolutionary movements through a period of "consolidation," and (b) to prepare the way for democratic elections under a new liberal constitutional system. The 14 December elections place the stamp of unmistakable popular approval on the course the Junta has followed, and leave the Acción Democrática in complete mastery of the Venezuelan political scene.

The democratic character of the present Venezuelan regime is indicated by (a) the decisive popular vote of confidence it received in the 14 December elections, (b) the social and economic policies to which the new Rómulo Gallegos government stands committed as the successor of the Junta, (c) the character of the regime's electoral system, as revealed both by the new suffrage legislation and the peaceful and fair manner in which the 14 December elections were conducted.

Three of Venezuela's four major parties ran presidential candidates in the recent election, and all four offered candidates for both houses of Congress. On the basis of approximately nine-tenths of the total vote (the other tenth is still to be counted), the electoral verdict stands as follows:

	Presidential ¹	Congressional
Acción Democrática	831,087	791,067
COPEI	261,753	200,777
Communist	35,716	43,148
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	1,128,556	1,034,992

Under the Venezuelan system of proportional representation it is expected that the composition of the houses of Congress will be:

	Senate	House
Acción Democrática	38	85
COPEI	6	20
Communists	1	4
Unión Republicana Democrática	1	4

¹ Completed count of votes cast for presidential candidates is: Gallegos (Acción Democrática) 871,752; Caldera (COPEI) 262,204; and Machado (Communist) 36,514. Completed count for congressional candidates is not available.

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The new Acción Democrática president, Rómulo Gallegos, will accordingly be able to count on firm congressional support for his legislative program.

The social and economic progressivism of the revolutionary Junta (to a continuation of which the newly elected Government is firmly committed) has been clearly demonstrated. Acción Democrática's leaders, out of an avowed determination to make AD a "popular" party, have deliberately sought, and won, support from all segments of the population. AD is not, therefore, a strictly working-class party, but rather a coalition of those groups that are seeking to promote the industrialization of the country, extensive land reforms, better standards of living, health measures and cultural opportunities for the people; and the establishment of a tradition of democratic processes. The Junta's accomplishments in education, housing, in extension of the trade-union movement, in improving working conditions in the country's industrial concerns, in basing taxation on ability to pay, in agrarian reform, and in the promotion of agricultural and pastoral production, attest to the progressive trend in Venezuelan public policy.

Because of post-revolutionary changes in Venezuela's electoral law and because of the impartial manner in which the Junta conducted the electoral campaign and the voting, the 14 December elections were Venezuela's first truly democratic national elections. This is evidenced by (a) the unprecedentedly large number of persons who cast their votes (Venezuela now has, to all intents and purposes, universal adult suffrage, and the final official count will almost certainly show that between one million and one and a quarter million persons voted, out of a population officially estimated at approximately 4,200,000) and (b) the poll involved, for the first time, direct election of all important national officials. Before the revolution, the electoral process had consisted of a series of indirect elections under which the voters elected the city councils; the councils elected the state legislatures; the state legislatures elected the Congressmen, and Congress selected the President. The December elections were, moreover, held without violence and, according to foreign and domestic observers alike, with exemplary honesty.

Acción Democrática's policies, and its avowed political philosophy as well, look to a rapid advance in Venezuela toward political, economic, and social equality; and its enemies, especially among the elements that governed the country in the past, miss no opportunity to identify it as a "radical" party and as a threat to the status quo. Some go still further, and describe it as a disguised Communist party; but all the evidence available points to the conclusion that (a) it is not only non-Communist but anti-Communist, (b) it is so regarded by the Communists themselves, and (c) it has gone out of its way to alienate any Communist support. Notwithstanding the Acción Democrática's anti-Communist attitude, the Communists will in all probability refrain from excessive or militant opposition since they are in agreement with many of the AD policies and since they reason that any alternative to AD might well be more anti-Communist and might seek to suppress the Communist Party or at least to curtail its activities.

The Acción Democrática does not deserve the Communist label its enemies have sought to fix on it. In fact, the great popular support won by the party in the

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December elections is another indication that, in the special conditions of Latin American politics, an active non-Communist progressive party constitutes one of the best guarantees against a strong Communist movement. In foreign policy the AD is pro-US and anti-USSR.

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ENCLOSURE "A"

DISSENT OF THE INTELLIGENCE DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

The Intelligence Division, Department of the Army, does not believe that Acción Democrática is at present an active non-communist party "which can be counted on to obstruct the development of a strong Communist movement." It is believed that Acción Democrática may cooperate with the Communists in the future if it seems expedient, as it has done in the past. It is not believed that the present Junta is democratic in operation nor that the 14 December elections place the stamp of "unmistakable popular approval" on the actions of Junta. It is the opinion of the Intelligence Division that the Junta has done little actually in the way of social and economic reform except on paper. It appears to the Intelligence Division that the nationalism of Acción Democrática represents a potential danger to United States interests in Venezuelan oil and that their present temperate pro-United States policy represents expediency.

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